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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1356
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3402
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2788
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000428

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SUBJECT: ARAL SEA SUMMIT A SUCCESS, SAYS KAZAKH AMBASSADOR

REF: BISHKEK 427 (NOTAL)

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Kazakh Ambassador Bakyt Ospanov called on the Ambassador April 30 to give her a readout of the April 28 Aral Sea Summit in Almaty. Ospanov termed the summit a success, and confirmed press reports that Kazakh President Nazarbayev had rebuked President Bakiyev for trying to widen the discussion to larger questions of regional water sharing and compensation. Ospanov said that Kazakhstan hopes to gain international support for the Aral Sea's restoration, in the form of both resources, and international pressure on Uzbekistan to restore water flows to the Aral Sea. END SUMMARY.

It Was Supposed to Be About the Aral Sea

12. (C) After requesting an urgent meeting, Kazakh Ambassador Bakyt Ospanov called on the Ambassador on 30 April to give her a readout of the April 28 Aral Sea Summit in Almaty. Ospanov put a positive spin on the Summit's outcome, saying that a great deal had been accomplished, and that all five Central Asian countries had signed a statement outlining a program of work for restoring the Aral Sea. The Ambassador asked about reports that Kazakh President Nazarbayev had rebuked President Bakiyev for trying to widen the discussion to larger questions of regional water sharing and compensation. Ospanov confirmed it, noting that the Summit was supposed to be wholly focused on the Aral Sea, which, he added, was a complicated and contentious enough subject without introducing additional issues.

13. (C) The Ambassador asked Ospanov if Russia had participated, and Ospanov said that they had, and that he had attended a presentation by the Russian Government. (Note: Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Sarbayev earlier told the Ambassador that Russia would not be participating in the Aral Sea Summit. See reftel.) The Ambassador asked if there were any realistic options for restoring the Aral Sea, short of

Uzbekistan turning away from a cotton monoculture. For example, did the Summit address the possible compensation of Uzbek farmers for their loss of revenue if they were to plant less cotton? Ospanov replied that the original plan had been for rivers in Siberia to be diverted to replace the lost water from the diversion of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers and that this was still the best solution. When the Ambassador expressed skepticism that the Russian Federation would agree to divert its rivers to help other, sovereign and independent states, Ospanov conceded that Russia was now unlikely to carry out the plans that had been formulated in the days of the Soviet Union.

The Plan: Dust Out, Money In

¶4. (C) In the absence of the USSR and its hubristic willingness to improve upon nature, Ospanov said that Kazakhstan's strategy for restoring the Aral Sea is to bring it to the world's attention, hoping that international donors will compensate Uzbek farmers, and international pressure will lead the Uzbek Government to restore some water flows to the sea. Ospanov enthusiastically laid out a case for international involvement: Regionally, the loss of the Aral Sea has led to local climate change and increased drought, and it is probably at least partially responsible for the shrinking of Kyrgyz glaciers and consequent water shortages. Additionally, the salts and pollutants on the former sea bed are picked up by the wind, and may travel as far as Western Europe. Therefore, he concluded, those countries should have an interest in paying for the Aral Sea's restoration.

¶5. (C) Ospanov concluded on an optimistic note, describing

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the success Kazakhstan has had in restoring the northern section of the Aral Sea. Some 16 varieties of fish are now thriving, according to Ospanov, and a fish processing plant has been opened. He also noted that oil and natural gas are likely to be found in the area, and if those resources are exploited, the area could become vibrant. Noting U.S.-Kazakhstan cooperation in areas ranging from Kazakh military units in Iraq to regional counterterrorism and counternarcotics work, he expressed the hope that cooperation could continue, and welcomed U.S. investment, in the Aral Sea area specifically and in Kazakhstan generally.

Comment

¶6. (C) Ospanov's motivations in providing this urgent readout of the Summit are unclear. He may want to build a relationship with the Ambassador, angle for greater U.S. involvement in Aral Sea restoration, perhaps as a counterweight to Russia's apparent interest, and/or provide a Kazakh view on a subject of great interest to our normal Kyrgyz interlocutors.
GFOELLER